

**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**DATE: 9 OCTOBER 2013**

**LEAD OFFICER: SUSIE KEMP, ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**SUBJECT: REVIEW OF LIBRARY POLICY STATEMENT- NOTICES POSTERS AND LEAFLETS FOR DISPLAY**



**SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

The local library is a focal point for information in the community and continuously attracts a large number of requests to display notices posters and leaflets. Criteria for displaying material are drawn up using space, relevance and legal requirements, and to protect the Libraries standing in the community as an unbiased source of public information to which all users have access.

Every year a very diverse range of individuals and organisations approach libraries asking them to display their material. The policy on what is acceptable or not acceptable for display is a sensitive issue. Some of this material is campaigning or contentious material and when declined, has produced difficult case issues in the past. In the light of this any changes to the policy and criteria for the display of notices, posters and leaflets is taken through the Council's decision making process.

The criteria have also been designed to help library staff both to make a judgement on what is acceptable and to explain that judgement to members of the public.

As a working tool, from time to time these criteria need updating, and must respond to change including increasing demand and the provision of information in some libraries on electronic display screens rather than in hard copy.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

It is recommended that:

1. the revised acceptability and handling criteria for notices, posters and leaflets in libraries, as set out in Annex 1 to this report, be agreed.
2. the application of the criteria be extended to the provision of information in libraries on electronic display screens.

**REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The introduction of electronic display screens in larger libraries increases the capacity of libraries to display information and reduce paper consumption, but criteria for display are still needed as for hard copy items.

Experience within the library service in 2012 of applying the criteria showed the need for revisions; in particular greater clarity for the public around the pressures on display space and why guaranteed display cannot be provided and the need for a final arbiter on suitability. In addition, greater clarity is needed to make decisions on

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materials raising support or funds for political campaigns.

<b><u>DETAILS:</u></b>
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**Business Case**

1. The local library is a focal point for information in the community and there is always pressure on space and the need for guidelines and priorities on the use of this space. The criteria have to cover many types of printed material, now including new ways of displaying information such as electronic display screens in some libraries, as well as priorities for display.
2. The proposed revisions to the criteria, shown at Annex 1 in bold, are based on practical experience within the library service over the last two years. Revisions are based around practical handling of the display materials, and whether or not an item is suitable for display.
3. In order to ensure that the largest number of people possible have an opportunity to use the space, a limit on poster size which was already in place has now been made explicit, as has no guarantee on display or length of display time unless legally required. In order to support staff in making difficult decisions, and as a point of referral, the role of the Information Services Manager within the library service as final arbiter in suitability decisions is also made clear.
4. Priorities for display remain unchanged from current working practices, with an emphasis on local material, and flexibility for local managers where space is available to accommodate other material that is within the acceptable criteria.
5. A key clarification is around material from political parties and campaign groups. Material from any political party is not acceptable. This is a legal requirement under the Local Government Act 1986 which prevents any local authorities from displaying any material designed to "affect support for a political party". In addition the current guidelines prohibit material which seeks to lobby or pressure sections of the government, or the population. This needed to be clarified to include notices or posters of any events designed to raise support, or funds, for political campaigns or those campaigning against Surrey County Council. In accordance with the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity the Council itself is not able to produce material whose primary purpose is to "persuade" the public to a particular point of view on a question of policy and it would be inconsistent to enable others to display similar material.
6. Clarification of the above points will both enable staff to deal more effectively and positively with requests for display and for the public to have realistic expectations of what can be displayed. Guidelines on how to display material in libraries is available on the libraries website and in leaflet format.

<b><u>CONSULTATION:</u></b>
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7. These proposed changes are based on feedback from frontline staff and the Libraries Information Services team who deal with these issues on a daily basis. They have been discussed with the Libraries Senior Management Team, Strategic Director and Cabinet Member.

- 8. The views of the public were also sought through display of the proposed changes in all Surrey libraries during August 2013, one of the busiest months for footfall. No comments on the proposed changes were received.

**RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:**

- 9. There may be some dissatisfaction from individuals and organisations if libraries fail to display their material. These will be addressed on an individual basis by the Information Services Manager. The library service strives to maintain its standing in the community as an unbiased source of public information and in this it is important that staff have clear guidelines when making decisions, and a senior manager to support them if these decisions are difficult or not accepted by a member of the public or organisation. It is also helpful if clear guidance can be given to the public when they are thinking of displaying materials.
- 10. If accepted, the revised guidelines will be made available on the libraries web site and in leaflet format or via email.

**Financial and Value for Money Implications**

- 11. There are no direct financial implications by this revision of criteria. However it is hoped that staff time will be reduced by the greater clarity available to staff and public.

**Section 151 Officer Commentary**

- 12. The Section 151 Officer (Chief Finance Officer) confirms that there are no financial implications arising from these revised criteria and that all material business issues and risks have been considered and addressed.

**Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer**

- 13. Reference to the relevant legal provisions is made above. When looking at the modification to the policy preventing campaign groups from displaying material, it is not the monitoring officer’s view that Article 10 of the Convention of Human Rights regarding freedom of expression is engaged. There are many other ways in which such groups opposed to any Council policy can express this, through for example handing out their material to the public, public meetings, websites and blogs and making representations to the Council through democratic processes when such policies are being considered. In any event this is a proportionate approach given the limited space available, the fact that this is not paid advertising, and given the statutory restrictions on the Council and the publicity code. The Council also has a duty of care to assist its staff when dealing with these issues.

**Equalities and Diversity**

- 14. The clarifications in this policy may mean that campaign groups representing people with particular protected characteristics will not be able to display their material in libraries if they are campaigning against Council policies. There are however plenty of other avenues by which their views can be made known- examples are given above in the monitoring officer’s section.

**Climate change/carbon emissions implications**

15. Reduction in paper waste through change to electronic display and reduction in surplus and unused display materials will be a positive outcome.

**WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:**

16. Staff will be advised of changes through bulletins and staff meetings.
17. Revisions will be made to the web site advisory content and leaflets for the public.
18. The revised criteria will be introduced from 1 November 2013.

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**Contact Officer:**

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**Consulted:**

Peter Milton, Head of Cultural Services  
Libraries Senior Management Team and library staff  
Libraries Information Service Team Manager

**Annexes:**

Annex 1 - Posters and leaflets for Display - policy statement.

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